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The Roles of the Home Demonstration Agent  
in the Better Farming Better Living Program

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Not long ago our Housing Specialist was telling me of a family with which she had worked who was faced with solving a problem in housing. They lived on a farm which was a good farm belonging to the husband's father. They lived in an old house which the family was interested in modernizing. Of course, they wanted central heat and plumbing. However, the house, although sound, needed to have some foundation work done on it before the conveniences which they wanted could be undertaken. The father-in-law was reluctant to spend money on housing since he felt that he and his family had lived in the house without improvements and that his son's family was no better.

This family was faced with the problem of alternate choices which we have been discussing this week. Let's see what their choices were:

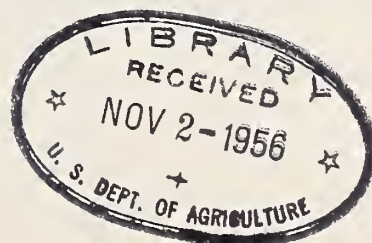
1. They could try again to persuade the father-in-law to improve the house the way they wanted it.
2. They could improve the house themselves and anticipate that if anything happened, the money would be spent to improve their living situation today without thought of possible recovery.
3. They could live in the house the way it was and accept the fact that if they stayed on that farm, they would have to accept the house.
4. They could decide to move away from the farm and get a farm which had the desired housing on it.

By defining these choices, the family was able to get away from some of their angry feeling toward the father-in-law and some of their own wishful thinking. In examining the choices, they could come to a conclusion and either initiate constructive action or accept the housing which they had with considerably more peace of mind.

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It appears to me that in discussing the roles of the home demonstration agent in the Better Farming Better Living, we need to use this technique which we have been discussing this week for use with farm families.

As an introduction, I would like to say that certainly no one expects more than an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. We here at the University feel a great deal of confidence in the field staff and believe in their management ability. Each person has only twenty-four hours. And of those twenty-four hours, we spend a certain amount of time working. We intend to make that time as profitable for the people in our counties as is possible to make it, but we are always faced with alternate choices since any able Extension worker must have more than he can do. So then what are our choices?

1. One choice is to tighten up on our management of the present program. I am sure that home demonstration agents who are working hard at the job will find it necessary to get into a management frame of mind in order to do this because we all have a feeling that we are managing what we are doing the best that we can at the present time. However, I would like to remind you that the heart of management is changing and that in any kind of work we tend to get into a habit of repeating our work the same way rather than thinking of new organization. This is a natural human feeling because by repeating the same pattern, our work becomes routinized and thus easier for us to do. Less thinking is required.

What are some of the ways we can tighten up on management?

- A. We may have some organizational shifts of responsibility in the home demonstration program.
  - (1) This brings up this question: Have we over-supervised in some cases? As trained professional people, are we spending too much time supervising detail which might be left to local leadership?
  - (2) Do we have our line of communications free enough so that we can delegate responsibility to other people and still be informed of what is going on?
- B. Have we examined the way we are spending our time in light of the objectives which we have established that we want to accomplish?

What other choice do we have? If the home demonstration agent reviews her work and comes to the conclusion that only minor changes can be

made in her activities to give herself more time, of course, she is faced with the problem of what step to take next.

2. The next choice is to meet with the groups of people who are consumers of home demonstration agent time, namely, the 4-H club groups and the home demonstration groups. At these meetings, the home demonstration agent can explain the objectives of the new program, explain how her time is being put to use at the present and ask for advice from her advisory groups on what changes they would like to see brought about. These groups may make choices that extend all the way from no change to much change. Assuming that they would feel that some change might be possible, the home agent would find it well worth her time to get a working committee from the Home Demonstration Council to take some responsibility in telling other people about the purposes of the program. Committees could help the home agent in some cases recruit leaders who might assist later on in the Better Farming Better Living program with special groups.

The home demonstration agent will need to develop techniques of adapting the principles of a general body of information such as: nutrition, family living, home management, etc., to specific use. This technique is a different technique from the one which she has been using extensively. It means adapting the principles of nutrition to an individual situation and at the same time convincing the family of the importance of such practice.

3. What other choice does she have? Some home demonstration agents may find it possible in their program to work with part of the groups which are started. If such is the case, I would think it would be far wiser to work with one group all the way through rather than to meet a little bit with each group without really getting into the problems of such groups.
4. There is another choice which, of course, is possible for the home demonstration agent and I am sure that we have some counties in the State where this choice will be necessary. Frankly, I always hesitate to mention it because I am always afraid the wrong people will decide that I mean them. Some home agents may come to the conclusion that the program will have to be on the basis of farm development in their county rather than farm and home development. In counties where we have nearly 2,000 women enrolled in home demonstration work and 500 or 600 4-H club girls as well as many other special interest activities for the people at large, it appears to me that the decision might have to be that we have reached the limit with what we

have. In other words, we have farmed extensively, we have made use of the best equipment which we could buy, we have applied fertilizer heavily, and we have perfected our techniques until any further improvements are in the nature of refinements rather than great changes. Such being the case, we have come to the point where we can say additional labor will be necessary to get an additional return on this land.

So to summarize, here are our choices as I see them. Perhaps there are other choices of which I am not aware.

1. Tighten up on our present management. Use our time to the fullest by examining our methods.
2. Meet with the groups of people who now use our time and see if any major shifts in the use of our time can be brought about.
3. We may decide to work with part of the groups which are developed.
4. We may not be able to include the home development part of the program except as it is already included in the general program until we get more labor.

Having discussed these possibilities let us see what the real challenges in this program are and what they can do for the home demonstration program. In my opinion, we have some opportunities offered us which we have been seeking for a long time.

1. To enrich and make more significant the general program in the county by firsthand information on the needs of family living. This is the technique for which we have been searching. In doing program planning in Indiana, we have striven each year to get each individual woman to recognize and point out the problems which she faces in home living. We have been aware that when the women met together to discuss these problems, one of the great difficulties was for them to recognize the problems which they had at home and to bring them into the general discussion. This new program offers us that information direct so that we can say here are a group of people who have this type of need for more information. Are your homes not similar to these? Incidentally, we also have an answer through this type of program planning to reply to any statement which is made anywhere about the home demonstration program being superficial by simply pointing out that these are problems of actual families. By having specific information, the general program should be enriched immeasurably.



2. We also have the challenge extended to us to further develop leaders' awareness of the purposes of the home demonstration program. Here is a plan which has its roots in the lives of individuals and in the lives of families. By helping these people with information and counsel, we have with each small group let people see the potential of the home demonstration program.
3. We have the opportunity to profit professionally from visits to these individual families. This point I can't emphasize too much because as each home economist takes her first group and visits each family individually she will come away with a great awareness of the intricate problems of people and also I hope with a great humility that they have asked her to help them. I hope, too, that she keeps firmly before her an awareness of her function as an educator which always means presentation of information and facts, the development of people's thinking and choosing possible solutions rather than an immature satisfaction in doing things for them. This is a test that separates the educators from the service performers. Although the line can never be drawn straight, the goal must be clear in the home agent's mind.
4. We also have the opportunity to disseminate technical information which bears on specific problems with the resulting satisfaction of being of service and building people's confidence in the help offered them through the Extension Service.

To conclude, I would like to compliment you on the fine work which you have done already. This work has great significance and great importance. This new program does not change the significance of the general program. It simply becomes the central furrow around which we can cultivate the rest of the program in a truer fashion. It provides us with real problems which become the basis of clearer objectives in some of the other Extension activities. It gives us information by which we can evaluate some of the results, some of the procedures, and directions which other programs have taken. The general extension program becomes the means by which we plow back this specific farm and family information making the entire program far richer and much clearer. This likewise is the place where you are offered the opportunity of enriching your own professional experience as well as your own human experience. By approaching our job with the same scientific method with which we are helping farm families approach theirs, we will enjoy the extra dividend resulting from purposeful planning and the serenity which accompanies a decision made after a careful examination of alternate choices.

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